

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE D-1WASHINGTON POST
11 May 1986

Georgetown's Media Pros

A University Thinks Hard About Its Think Tank

By Alison Muscatine

THE PHOTOGRAPHS in the fourth-floor lobby of the Center for Strategic and International Studies make it clear that this is no ordinary faculty lounge. On one wall are black-and-white photographs of Henry Kissinger, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Zbigniew Brzezinski, James Schlesinger—all hawkish defenders of military power, all former government officials, all current or former “faculty” at this peculiar institution.

Apart from knowing the center's reputation as a parking lot for former government big shots, few in Washington can tell you exactly what the center does. Apparently neither can CSIS's parent organization, Georgetown University. Now the university's president, the Rev. Timothy S. Healy, wants to find out. He has appointed a committee of five highly respected intellectuals to review CSIS, with particular focus on the quality of research done by the 140 fellows at the center.

“What we're talking about is a very serious, academic review,” Healy says. “It's a kind of periodic review.”

Other than that, Healy provides few clues. But rumors are rampant that the center's reputation as a conservative propaganda machine may be what motivated the former professor of English literature to assemble his panel of experts.

Why do questions about the caliber of the center's academic research arise?

Perhaps because CSIS doesn't have a library. Perhaps because CSIS “faculty” are seen more often on television news shows than in a classroom: The day after the U.S. bombing of Libya, for example, three CSIS fellows were assembled as guests on the MacNeil-Lehrer news-hour—Brzezinski, G. Henry M. Schuler and George A. Carver Jr. On the first night that the disaster in Chernobyl was reported in the West, Thane Gustafson, director of CSIS' Soviet program, appeared on the evening news on ABC and NBC, MacNeil-Lehrer and ABC's “Nightline” (CBS Evening News filmed him but did not use the clip), and he wrote the lead article for The Washington Post's Outlook section on May 4. Robert H. Kupperman, CSIS' director of science and technology, was interviewed on the BBC, CBS “Nightwatch,” CNN, National Public Radio and quoted in stories in The Wall Street Journal and Newsweek among others in connection with the Libyan strike.

In total, during the six weeks spanning the terrorist bombing of a disco in West

Germany, the Libyan strike and the Chernobyl nuclear accident, CSIS fellows had 650 media contacts—television appearances, op-ed columns, and quotations in news stories—far more than have been tallied over the years by the Georgetown professoriate.

But that's not all. If the absence of books and the emphasis on media aren't enough to make a liberal Jesuit cringe, the center, for much of its 24-year history, also has had a reputation for being a superficial (by academic standards), right-wing think tank.

Founded in 1962 with a budget of \$120,000 and housed in a Georgetown townhouse, its first full-time staff member was Richard V. Allen, a conservative Republican who later became President Reagan's first national security affairs adviser. Most of CSIS' money, in the early years, came from right-wing foundations such as the Scaife Foundation, connected to the Mellon family in Pittsburgh, and from conservative philanthropists such as Justin Dart.

In 1972, students at Georgetown tried to get the university to shut the center, insisting (incorrectly) that it was supported by CIA funds. Whatever the students' distaste, even some conservative fellows found the place disappointing intellectually. “When I went, I held my nose,” said one prominent CSIS fellow who has been at CSIS since the mid-1970s. “Walter Laqueur [a highly regarded historian who is also on the Georgetown faculty] was there, but apart from him the rest were duds. I was appalled by the complete lack of scholarship.”

Relationships between universities and research centers are often odd and uncomfortable. Stanford University closed the Stanford Research Institute—later renamed SRI—during the Vietnam War, and now is in constant battles with its conservative Hoover Institution on War, Peace and Revolution. The University of California has had uneasy dealings with its Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, where classified research on nuclear weapons is a staple. CSIS, for its part, never participates in classified or proprietary projects, and limits its government contracts to less than 15 percent of its work. Although the center technically is not a lobbying outfit, questions linger about its active role in the pub-

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